Impaired Driving

“Every day, 32 people in the United States die in motor vehicle crashes that involve an alcohol-impaired driver. This amounts to one death every 45 minutes.1 The annual cost of alcohol-related crashes totals more than $51 billion.2 But there are effective measures that can help prevent injuries and deaths from alcohol-impaired driving.

How big is the problem?

- In 2008, 11,773 people were killed in alcohol-impaired driving crashes, accounting for nearly one third (32%) of all traffic-related deaths in the United States.1
- Of the 1,347 traffic fatalities among children ages 0 to 14 years in 2008, about one out of every six (16%) involved an alcohol-impaired driver.1
- Of the 216 child passengers ages 14 and younger who died in alcohol-impaired driving crashes in 2008, about half (99) were riding in the vehicle with the alcohol-impaired driver.1
- In 2008, over 1.4 million drivers were arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol or narcotics.3 That’s less than one percent of the 159 million self-reported episodes of alcohol-impaired driving among U.S. adults each year.4
- Drugs other than alcohol (e.g., marijuana and cocaine) are involved in about 18% of motor vehicle driver deaths. These other drugs are often used in combination with alcohol.5

Who is most at risk?

- Young people:
  - At all levels of blood alcohol concentration (BAC), the risk of being involved in a crash is greater for young people than for older people.6
  - Among drivers with BAC levels of 0.08 % or higher involved in fatal crashes in 2008, more than one out of every 3 were between 21 and 24 years of age (34%). The next two largest groups were ages 25 to 34 (31%) and 35 to 44 (25%).1
- Motorcyclists:
  - Among motorcyclists killed in fatal crashes, 30% have BACs of 0.08% or greater.7
  - Nearly half of the alcohol-impaired motorcyclists killed each year are 40 or older, and motorcyclists ages 40-44 have the highest percentage of fatalities with BACs of 0.08% or greater (44%).7
- Drivers with prior driving while impaired (DWI) convictions:
  - Drivers with a BAC of 0.08% or higher involved in fatal crashes were eight times more likely to have a prior conviction for DWI than were drivers with no alcohol (8% and 1%, respectively).1

How can deaths and injuries from impaired driving be prevented?

Effective measures include:

- Aggressively enforcing existing 0.08% BAC laws, minimum legal drinking age laws, and zero tolerance laws for drivers younger than 21 years old in all states.3,6,9
- Promptly revoking the driver’s licenses of people who drive while intoxicated.10
- Using sobriety checkpoints.11
• Implementing health promotion efforts that use an ecological framework to influence economic, organizational, policy, and school/community action.\textsuperscript{12,13}

• Using multi-faceted community-based approaches to alcohol control and DWI prevention.\textsuperscript{10,14,15}

• Requiring mandatory substance abuse assessment and treatment for DWI offenders.\textsuperscript{16}

Other suggested measures include:

• Reducing the legal BAC limit to 0.05%.\textsuperscript{17,18}

• Raising state and federal alcohol excise taxes.\textsuperscript{18}

• Implementing compulsory blood alcohol testing when traffic crashes result in injury.\textsuperscript{18}

References


